

SIR ARTHUR MITCHELL'S RETIREMENT FROM
THE LUNACY BOARD.

WE have the greatest possible pleasure in reproducing in the pages of the *Poor Law Magazine*, for the benefit of our readers, and as a permanent record of, and tribute to, a man so highly esteemed and so greatly beloved as Sir Arthur Mitchell, the following able and appreciative article (slightly abridged) from the *Scotsman* of 27th November last, written by one who evidently knows his subject well, and has a warm and sympathetic interest in the man and his work. We are sure that every Poor Law Officer, every Superintendent of an Asylum, and indeed, every member of the general community who has come into contact with Sir Arthur Mitchell, will endorse the high estimate here expressed regarding his character and ability, his earnest humane zeal for the welfare of the insane, and his uniform courteous, dignified, and kindly bearing towards all who were engaged in the work of their care and treatment. His absence from the General Board of Lunacy will be deeply felt, not only on that Board itself, but all over the Parochial world, for within his peculiar sphere it may be truly said—

‘He was a man, take him for all in all,
We shall not look upon his like again.’

‘The public will learn with much regret that Sir Arthur Mitchell, K.C.B., retires from his position as a Commissioner in Lunacy at the beginning of next year. At the passing of the Lunacy Act of 1857 he was appointed one of the Deputy Commissioners, and in 1870 he became a Commissioner. He has thus completed thirty-seven years of service.

‘It is understood that Sir George Trevelyan, in recognition of Sir Arthur’s distinguished services, and in order to make his knowledge and experience still useful to the country, offered him the chairmanship of the Board after the death of Sir John Don Wauchope. Sir Arthur did not, however, feel himself able to accept the offer, chiefly, it is believed, from considerations relating to his health, but largely also because he thought that it might lessen the influence of the Board if medical men constituted the majority of its members.

‘It is beyond doubt the case that lunacy administration in Scotland has drawn its inspiration from Sir Arthur Mitchell more

than from any one else. Connected with the Board from its institution, he may be truly said to have been the guiding spirit in shaping and developing its policy. Of the system of caring for the insane in private dwellings as it exists at present in Scotland—that feature of Scottish lunacy administration which specially distinguishes it from the lunacy administration of any other country—Sir Arthur was the creator. His work on ‘*The Insane in Private Dwellings*,’ written in 1864, did much more than merely sow the seed from which the system of caring for the insane out of asylums has been developed. The views which it enunciated were mature, and they established the system virtually as it exists in Scotland at this day.

‘In this matter, as in every matter connected with lunacy, Sir Arthur’s foremost consideration was to promote the wellbeing of the insane, and to secure for them the greatest possible amount of individual liberty of which their condition admitted; but he never forgot the economic side of the question, and he never considered any scheme for providing for the insane of a locality without keeping prominently in view the interests of the ratepayer.

‘Sir Arthur, as a public servant, spared no pains to inform himself thoroughly as to all the facts and circumstances of whatever subject came before him; and that being done, he possessed in an eminent degree the power of seeing at once where the kernel of the matter lay, and of going straight to its heart. To this faculty must in no small degree be attributed the power and success with which he impressed his views upon District Lunacy Boards, Superintendents of Asylums, and Parochial Boards. But something in addition even to knowledge and reason, backed by a powerful will, enabled him to win over others to his way of thinking. Sir Arthur possesses a profound knowledge of men, and while his views were always expressed and maintained with perfect firmness, they were also expressed with a perfect courtesy and tact that might well have secured the adoption of views in themselves less convincing. It is not wonderful, therefore, that his relations with all officials with whom he came in contact were of the most cordial character, and that his advice and assistance have been constantly sought and highly valued, both by public officials of all kinds and degrees and by private persons. His relations with his colleagues and

with all the officers of his own Board have been those of unbroken harmony. His wide sympathies, kindly nature, and ready recognition of merit have drawn out the highest qualities of those under him, and have proved him an official chief of the best type.

'Sir Arthur's work in connection with the relations of the State to lunacy has been extended to England and Ireland as well as Scotland. This work often entailed absences from Scotland of considerable length, and as no special means were adopted for the performance of his duties while absent, he could only overtake his own proper work by the sacrifice of his vacations. He also made himself useful in similar directions to the colonies and dependencies of Great Britain, and to many other countries.

'In 1880 he was appointed a member of a Commission on Criminal Lunacy (England), of which Mr Courtney, M.P., was chairman. He regularly attended the meetings in the Home Office, and he greatly influenced the character of the Report and of the Act which followed it.

'In 1885 he was appointed a member of a Departmental Committee on Criminal Lunatics in Ireland, and in 1889 he became chairman of a Commission to inquire into the whole lunacy administration of Ireland. The work of this Commission extended over some years, and it is understood that a bill has already been drafted on the lines of the Report.

'From 1867 to 1871 he held the position of Morison Lecturer on Insanity to the Royal College of Physicians, and many of the lectures he then delivered were published. His published papers on lunacy are very numerous, and deal not only with its social and State aspects, but also with its strictly medical aspects. In many directions they have had an important influence on opinion and practice.

'In addition to the recognition by the State of distinguished merit, implied in his appointment to the English and Irish Commissions already referred to, Sir Arthur was the recipient of the Orders of Companion of the Bath from Mr Gladstone in 1886, and of Knight Commander of the Bath from Lord Salisbury in 1887. Among academic and other honours conferred upon him may be mentioned the degree in 1875 of LL.D. from his *Alma Mater*, the Aberdeen University, of which he graduated as M.A. and M.D.; Hon. Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland in 1891; Professor of Ancient History to the Royal

Scottish Academy and H.R.S.A. in 1878; Rhind Lecturer in Archæology in 1876-7-8; secretary for many years, and twice vice-president of the Society of Antiquaries; vice-president of the Royal Society, 1891-2-3; hon. secretary of the Meteorological Society, and for many years has been and still is a director of the Ben Nevis Observatory; Morison Lecturer on Mental Diseases to the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, 1867-1871; and member of the Universities (Scotland) Commission.

‘When Sir Arthur retires, his colleague, Dr. Sibbald, becomes the senior paid Commissioner. The salary of the gentleman selected to fill the vacant Commissionership is £1000 for the first five years, when it rises to £1200, which Sir Arthur and Dr. Sibbald now have.

‘Sir Arthur Mitchell, though not physically robust, has scarcely ever been absent from his post through illness. He has been a hard worker, and whatever matter he has taken in hand, he has gone into with all his heart and soul, his great store of nervous energy, upon which he could draw at will for any special exertion, having stood him here in good stead.

‘Though his life’s work, as regards active concern in the administration of lunacy, ends with his retirement, it is certain that he will not lose his interest in lunacy, or cease to work for it, though out of harness. Fortunately, however, for himself, and for the world at large, Sir Arthur is a man of wide interests and wide accomplishment. He has already done brilliant work in other fields than lunacy—in pure science, especially meteorology, and in archæology. His work ‘The Past in the Present,’ from which Mr. Gladstone quoted in his speech on the Reform Bill, and Mr. Bright in his Glasgow Rectorial address, has had a deep influence on the methods of archæological research. Sir Arthur’s well-earned leisure will, it may be confidently predicted, lead to his devoting himself with renewed energy to fresh research, and to the further inculcation of sound views and methods in regard to those subjects which he has made his own. To his resumption of such work, untrammelled by the cares of office, his numerous friends in Scotland, and beyond it, look forward with the greatest pleasure, and they cordially wish that he may have before him many happy and fruitful years, not only for his own sake, but also to enable him further to enrich science and literature.’